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SEC SANITIZED VERSION NLK 77-311

VIENTIANE

Question

Answer

1. What is your assessment of the increase in the fighting capabilities of the FAL forces that will have been brought about during the cease fire and their prospective fighting capabilities as of end of this rainy season. In this connection would particularly like your comments on:

- a. Morale, motivation and willingness to fight.
- b. Degree of improvement in technical proficiency.
- c. Quality of FAL troop commanders.
- d. Areas where U.S. support would be required to provide more effective fighting force (e. g. , logistics, communication, engineer, air support, etc.)

2. What is your assessment of the improvement in the fighting capabilities of the PL during this period?

- a. What is your assessment of probable relative strengths of the two forces at the end of the rainy season?
- b. In connection with foregoing, what explicit judgments do you make re extent of current Viet Minh support of PL?

1. Unlikely to be substantially greater than as described in ML 2902 of 1 July. In absence of improved leadership, FAL will be incapable of more than delaying action against enemy at that time.

- a. Function of leadership which seriously lacking in FAL.
- b. Slow but steady progress with MAAG help. Overall improvement - 20%.
- c. Officers lack leadership ability and competence. There is no short-term solution to this.
- d. Cadre FAL using foreign resources, and provide USMTT's to command elements to Battalion level. Logistics a major FAL weakness. Encadrement will help here and MAAG studying best methods.

2. Improving tactical positions; effecting logistical build-up; morale appears high; has capability of initiating offensive on all major fronts at a time and location of his own choosing.

- a. FAL capability will continue inferior to pro-Communist forces in Laos.
- b. VM cadres provided in required numbers; some artillery units 100% VM; some Bns believed to be completely VN as spearhead major enemy offensives.

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Vientiane (Cont'd)

- c. What account could FAL give against PL, assuming no increase in current level of VM support, if Phoumi were to concentrate his forces in the South trying to hold roughly along the present cease fire lines and to mop up PL pockets in S. Laos including Tchepone area?
3. If you judge Phoumi's forces inadequate for foregoing mission, how large a supplement to those forces from SVN and Thai would be required to do the job?
4. What are the current capabilities of Meos and what will be their capabilities by end of rainy season? Are more special forces men needed for Meo training?
- c. Concentration of FAL in South would enhance capability to delay PL/KL forces, but no scheme of maneuver can offset leadership weakness of FAL.
3. If outside troops are well trained, well equipped, and properly employed, a division with supporting combat arms and adequate logistic support from each of the two countries, a wing of efficient fighter-bombers, and a troop carrier wing would be adequate, provided FAL leadership were improved. ~~At~~ support should include reconnaissance capability. These forces would permit fairly rapid clearing of organized Communist forces in South, including Vientiane area and consolidation operations to suppress PL guerrillas. This response includes no reinforcement of Pre-Communist forces in Laos by Sino-Soviet cadre, volunteers, or combat units, an assumption which is believed to be unrealistic.
4. Improvement of Meo irregular forces continuing at satisfactory pace. Organization deficiencies in hastily armed Meo groups are being corrected and new areas opened for recruitment.
- These forces will possess a very substantial guerrilla capability if employed in coordination with effective regular force in renewed hostilities.
- To realize maximum Meo capability, addition of a special forces command and staff detachment and 5 12-man field training detachments are required. This requirement may increase if recruitment potential realized. PARU capability for stiffening Meos should be fully utilized.

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Vientiane (Cont'd)

5. Other than major U.S. combat land forces, what level and nature of U.S. support would be required:

a. To generate sufficient willingness to undertake the operation described above?

b. To maximize the operation's chance for success?

5. ~~Ask~~ U.S. air support (see 3 above) and encadrement (see 1. d above).

Air support to:

- (1) Maintain air superiority
- (2) Interdict supply routes
- (3) Destroy enemy bases in Laos
- (4) Close air support

Phoumi would undertake operation in South Laos if circumstances dictated but would continue to hope for U.S. support. He probably also feels reasonably sure of support from SVN and possibly Thai.

6. Most certainly.

Do you see any special problems such as in command relationships or in planning and implementation of operations which might be anticipated given the diverse personalities involved?

What arrangements to you think most likely to be conducive to co-operative effective effort?

What would be the nature and extent of U.S. role in providing guidance or direction to this effort?

7. Is MAAG in Laos adequate in size and qualifications of personnel to meet requirements implicit in such an operation?

Phoumi would wish overall command of a combined staff though his plans so far do not deal with this. Thai and Vietnamese would probably not like this arrangement in view of their investment in the enterprise and their past observation of FAL efficiency.

A combined staff nominally headed by Phoumi but with a U.S. officer as Deputy or C/S.

It is a question whether this would be acceptable to all concerned in the absence of U.S. ground forces.

7. Headquarters personnel sufficient if projected TD is met. Field representation another matter - need staff advisory team with adequate support, and special forces personnel will be required (see 4 above).

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Vientiane (Cont'd)

8. Additional comments.

8. To hold Luang Prabang would require perhaps another division.

Believe also should consider steps to hold Sayaboury.

BANGKOK

1. What measures do you believe Sarit would be willing and able immediately to undertake in NE Thailand directed toward deterrence of the development of any guerrilla threat in that area which might be expected to arise from Lao situation?

1. If U.S. assures necessary support and if Laos situation requires action, Sarit would probably reorganize set-up in Thailand for better counter-guerrilla *deterrence* in North and NE Thai which are equally vulnerable to Communist infiltration. First priority is centralized control for intelligence and operations in special security areas. Measures recommended: Position aircraft and ground forces near border; organize Mekong R. patrol; train 2 battalions for specialized warfare; concentrate intelligence effort in NE; train border police.

In this connection, do you now have any specific recommendations on magnitude and nature of U.S. assistance in such a program? For example, do you believe Sarit would be receptive to MAP equipping Thai engineer construction battalion for construction of secondary and access roads?

U.S. to provide 1 squadron of helos and 1 squadron of transports such as Caribou, and field radios. Need U.S. Army Eng. Construction Battalion because Thai do not have such unit. Road network just adequate; to improve and maintain existing roads is large and time-consuming job. U.S. must also develop airfields for airlift capability, build field quarters and facilities for redeployment of Thais to Northern areas, deploy one U.S. Special Forces Bn. to NE, assist in move of Vietnamese minority to internment camps provide relief for Lao refugees, increase political communication capability.

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Bangkok (Cont'd)

2. Would Sarit be willing to join a cooperative military action with Phoumi and Diem designed to hold roughly along present cease fire lines, mopping up pockets of PL resistance in S. Laos including Tchepone? If so, what types of support and guarantees would Sarit expect from U.S.?

2. Sarit would join if U.S. ground and air forces also engaged in cooperative military action in Laos. U.S. contribution to include logistic support of RTAF, U.S. ground units, U.S. air support and reconnaissance in Laos, and U.S. aid in air defense of Thailand, possibly U.S. advisor in RTG combat units in Laos, and share financial burden. U.S. to make commitment protect Thai unilaterally and outside SEATO if attacked.

Believe fight in Laos would be on large scale, not mop-up unless partition possible.

3. Is the MAAG in Thailand adequate in size and quality of personnel to meet the requirements of the action described above?

3. JUSMAG needs 100 additional positions now for above program. Quality of personnel under review. JUSMAG not organized for operational task and need field headquarters.

4. What is your estimate of the capability of Thai troops if they should become engaged in joint operation with FAL and SVN as projected in 2 above?

4. Thai capabilities good. Would make good anti-guerrilla showing in Thailand and, with U.S. soldiers alongside, would fight well in Laos.

5. Do you see any special problems, such as in command relationships or in planning and implementation of operations which might be anticipated given diverse personalities involved? What arrangements do you think most likely to be conducive to cooperative and effective effort? What would be the nature and extent of U.S. role in providing guidance or direction to this effort?

5. The more U.S. assumes leadership, the less problems in command and intra-national differences. Do not believe Thai would accept command by Lao or Vietnamese, and vice versa. Suggest joint intelligence and planning group be set up - US/Thai/Laos/SVN.

6. Additional comments.

6. Emphasizes urgency due to coming dry season. Stresses need hold Lao Panhandle and all of Mekong Valley. If not hold, eventual U.S. commitment would be large salvage situation.

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SAIGON

1. What is your assessment of the likely scale and character of the Viet Cong effort over coming months?

1. VC likely concentrate on increased number small-scale military attacks and political action in all parts of SVN. Stepped-up action in central VN, and near Lao border, and probably in Saigon area expected. Larger scale activity not likely without obvious increase in DRV aid which not expected. DRV overt aggression inhibited by possible ICG action and provocation of U.S. or SEATO intervention. We will emphasize organization of national revolution [REDACTED]

VC logistic base not sufficient to support large-scale military operations, but can gain objectives by successful guerrilla action to frustrate GVN armed forces to point of bringing about coup.

2. When are the Vietnamese likely to produce a plan for the systematic elimination of the Viet Cong; and what ideas does Task Force Saigon have about what such a systematic plan should look like?

2. Cannot predict when; continue to press for action. CIP action completed in areas of major command organization. and concept of operation. Need statement of objectives, statement of responsibilities, machinery for coordination and execution, detailed annexes supporting concept of operation, annex showing geographic priorities for action and goals for pacification phases. Plans must be flexible and recognize prerequisite for military action in strong VC areas.

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Saigon (Cont'd)

3. What are the possibilities of further action by Diem's forces against NVN: (1) by airdrops? (2) by coastal raids? What would be Diem's attitude to an enlarged program supported by U.S.?

3. Diem not impetuous man. Actions to date - build intelligence base and provide foundation for restricted harassment and sabotage. He seeks to avoid encouraging any premature violent uprising which would be repressed for lack of sufficient support from free world. Diem sees that larger scale attacks upon NVN would extend DRV's liberty of action against SVN when he has enough problems from DRV's covert attacks.

(1) Accepted tactic, but fears loss of few qualified pilots available to SVN. Within limits outlined above, he would probably accept an enlarged program, especially if modern aircraft and additional crews provided.

(2) Diem accepts coastal infiltration of agents. Any program of raids would be evaluated against above considerations and problems of DRV naval defenses (includes 25 modern Swatow class patrol gunboats).

4. Is the counter-guerrilla training adequate which is being conducted? Do we have the necessary U.S. Special Forces personnel for the job?

4. Quality of training excellent. Problem lies in ARVN making available sufficient forces for training. Success will depend on completion 20,000 increase which will free more operational units for this purpose.

Sufficient U.S. Special Forces personnel are available for the job.

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Saigon (Cont'd)

5. What would be the effect upon Viet Nam troop requirements if Diem were encouraged to push out into Laos in order to control infiltration routes? Would Diem be willing to join in a cooperative action with Laos and Thailand to clean up the Pan-handle of Laos?

5. Diem concerned with S. Laos and would like to see clean-up action there. His decision to join would have to consider broadening of SVN war and limited available forces to meet current military means. Believe he would seriously consider some additional forces beyond small number of SVN Special Forces and regulars now engaged in Laos and along Lao border. Such additional forces would be small except might risk commitment larger forces to prevent intensified future VC infiltration through Laos as calculated risk. In latter case, probable only be considered in time frame required ready additional forces already authorized (late 1961). Should be recognized that commitment poses possible escalation (from small to sizeable SVN force). In this case keep in mind that the additional 30,000 increment is needed for internal counter-insurgency at present intensity.

Diem might not insist on actual involvement U.S. forces at outset of cooperative action but would seek commitment to send in U.S. forces if need developed.

What is your assessment in Saigon of the likelihood that Sarit and [redacted] would cooperate in such an effort?

[redacted] Sarit might balk at emphasis on Southern Laos as against all of Mekong Valley (or Thai border). If both operations undertaken, Sarit would join.

6. Additional comments.

6. GVN not capable controlling rugged border infiltration points. Force required for this purpose prohibitive. It is possible, however, control sizeable Communist troop units or supply routes

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Saigon (Cont'd)

by location GVN on major avenues of approach and on commanding terrain. Troop commitments for this purpose based same factors as above (see 5). MAAG studying R&D methods halt infiltration which are long range in effect and are expected reduce not stop infiltration.

GVN will have to depend on U.S. advisory capability to plan for large scale or combined operations.

Command should remain national, coordinated by U.S. headquarters. Possible major obstacle might arise in getting agreement on U.S. direction unless U.S. troops committed.

MOSCOW

1. What would be USSR and ChiCom reaction to U.S. action in Laos?

1. Embtel 1721 of 23 Jan 1961 still valid. If large scale hostilities resumed, USSR would seek keep ChiCom out of Laos by providing logistic support themselves, and rely on DRV to provide combat support to PL. However, if operations serious threat to PL, Soviets and ChiCom have analogous interests in seeking prevent Bloc loss of prestige.

Reference telegram states USSR would react, short of total war, if onus of situation could be placed on U.S.

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